

## **Fulfillment of USG Obligation to Issue (20,000) Travel Documents**

Press Statement by James C. Cason, Chief of Mission, U.S. Interests Section,  
Havana, Cuba  
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The U.S. Interests Section in Havana, Cuba, has issued 20,075 travel documents to Cubans in the fiscal year that ends September 30, fulfilling the annual U.S. obligation under the U.S.-Cuba Migration Accords to approve 20,000 travel documents. This achievement underlines our continuing commitment to safe, legal and orderly migration.

The Castro regime's repeated allegations about purported U.S. designs to precipitate a mass migration crisis are patently false. If the Cuban regime would allow the U.S. Interests Section access to Cuban official media, we could inform the Cuban people about their options to seek a better life through legal emigration as opposed to risking their lives through illegal migration. Instead, the Castro regime prefers to keep Cubans uninformed about their emigration possibilities.

The U.S. Government has honored its Migration Accord commitments. We wish that the Castro regime also would adhere to its commitments under the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and stop the practice of denying exit permits to hundreds of Cubans who have received U.S. travel documents. We also call upon the Cuban regime to cease its practice of dispossessing migrants of all of their belongings and charging them exorbitant fees. These are cynical and humiliating procedures that violate Cuba's international obligations. We are aware that the Castro regime has denied exit permits to 533 people so far during the current fiscal year, including 171 doctors and other medical personnel.

Cubans who don't have a choice to leave legally are risking their lives, in the greatest numbers we have seen since 1994, on dangerously inadequate watercraft. So far during this fiscal year, the U.S. Coast Guard has interdicted 2,402 Cubans at sea, more than double the number during the previous fiscal year. Increasingly desperate to leave the island and evade interdiction, many Cubans are now departing for Mexico or Honduras, from where they hope to cross overland into the United States.

Meeting our Migration Accord 20,000 person per year obligation also is a reminder to ordinary Cubans that the 1998 special Cuban visa lottery, also known as *el bombo*, in which approximately half a million Cubans participated, is still functioning. The 1998 lottery helps preserve the option of a safe, legal way for families that participated to leave Cuba. However, the Cuban regime's refusal to allow a new lottery has robbed thousands of people too young to participate in the 1998 lottery, as well as thousands more whose circumstances on the island remain intolerable, of the opportunity for safe migration. The Cuban regime should allow another visa lottery to be held to refresh the potential migration pool.

By failing to dredge the port of Cabanas, the designated port for repatriation of Cubans picked up at sea by the U.S. Coast Guard, or offering an alternate port, the Cuban regime has significantly complicated, and delayed, the timely return to Cuba of its own citizens. Currently, only small U.S. Coast Guard vessels can currently be used for repatriations given the shallowness of the Cabanas port.

Since the Cuban regime has chosen repeatedly to lie about U.S. policy towards Cuba, we reiterate that the United States is committed to a rapid, peaceful transition to a democratic, market-oriented Cuba. As the report of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba states, the United States stands ready to help the Cuban people work towards democracy now and in the future, should the Cuban people so request.